



Biden toughens border, offers legal path for 30,000 a month



Haitian migrants who hope to apply for asylum in the U.S. wait to register their names on a list made by a religious organization in Reynosa, Mexico, Dec. 21, 2022, on the other side of the border with McAllen, Texas.

By COLLEEN LONG and ZEKE MILLER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Thursday the U.S. would immediately begin turning away Cubans, Haitians and Nicaraguans who cross the border from Mexico illegally, his boldest move yet to confront the arrivals of migrants that have spiraled since he took office two years ago.

The new rules expand on an existing effort to stop Venezuelans attempting to enter the U.S., which began in October and led to a dramatic drop in Venezuelans coming to the south-

ern border. Together, they represent a major change to immigration rules that will stand even if the Supreme Court ends a Trump-era public health law that allows U.S. authorities to turn away asylum-seekers.

"Stay where you are and apply legally from there," he advised. Biden made the announcement just days before a planned visit to El Paso, Texas, on Sunday for his first trip to the southern border as president. From there, he will travel on to Mexico City to meet with North American leaders on Monday and Tuesday.

Homeland Security officials said they would begin de-

nying asylum to those who circumvent legal pathways and do not first ask for asylum in the country they traveled through en route to the U.S.

Instead, the U.S. will accept 30,000 people per month from the four nations for two years and offer the ability to work legally, as long as they come legally, have eligible sponsors and pass vetting and background checks. Border crossings by migrants from those four nations have risen most sharply, with no easy way to quickly return them to their home countries.

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Aruba welcomed more than 610,000 cruise passengers in 2022



Gino Frans, of Eliezer Foundation, celebrated 26 years free from addiction



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Biden toughens border, offers legal path for 30,000 a month

Continued from Front

"This new process is orderly," Biden said. "It's safe and humane, and it works." The move, while not unexpected, drew swift criticism from asylum and immigration advocates, who have had a rocky relationship with the president.

"President Biden correctly recognized today that seeking asylum is a legal right and spoke sympathetically about people fleeing persecution," said Jonathan Blazer, the American Civil Liberties Union's director of border strategies. "But the plan he announced further ties his administration to the poisonous anti-immigrant policies of the Trump era instead of restoring fair access to asylum protections."

Even with the health law restrictions in place, the president has seen the numbers of migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border rise dramatically during his two years in office; there were more than 2.38 million stops during the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, the first time the number topped 2 million. The administration has struggled to clamp down on crossings, reluctant to take hard-line measures that would resemble those of the Trump administration.

That's resulted in relentless criticism from Republicans who say the Democratic president is ineffective on border security, and the newly minted Republican House majority has promised congressional investigations on the matter.

The new policy could result in 360,000 people from these four nations lawfully entering the U.S. in a year, a huge number. But far more people from those countries have been attempting to cross into the U.S. on foot, by boat or swimming; migrants from those four countries were stopped 82,286 times in November alone.

Mexico has agreed to accept up to 30,000 migrants each month from the four countries who attempt to walk or swim across the



President Joe Biden speaks about border security in the Roosevelt Room of the White House, Thursday, Jan. 5, 2023, in Washington. Vice President Kamala Harris stands at left.

Associated Press

U.S.-Mexico border and are turned back. Normally, these migrants would be returned to their country of origin, but the U.S. can not easily send back people from those four countries for a variety of reasons that include relations with the governments there.

Anyone coming to the U.S. is allowed to claim asylum, regardless of how they crossed the border, and migrants seeking a better life in the U.S. often pay smugglers the equivalent of thousands of dollars to deliver them across the dangerous Darien Gap.

But the requirements for granting asylum are narrow, and only about 30% of applications are granted. That has created a system in which migrants try to cross between ports of en-

try and are allowed into the U.S. to wait out their cases. But there is a 2 million-case immigration court backlog, so cases often are not heard for years.

The only lasting way to change the system is through Congress, but a bipartisan congressional effort on new immigration laws failed shortly before Republicans took the House majority.

"The actions we're announcing will make things better, but will not fix the border problem completely," Biden said, in pressing lawmakers to act.

Under then-President Donald Trump, the U.S. required asylum seekers to wait across the border in Mexico. But clogs in the immigration system created long delays, leading to fet-

ter, dangerous camps over the border where migrants were forced to wait. That system was ended under Biden, and the migrants who are returned to Mexico under the new rules will not be eligible for asylum. Biden will also triple the number of refugees accepted to the U.S. from the Western Hemisphere, to 20,000 from Latin America and Caribbean, over the next two years. Refugees and asylum-seekers have to meet the same criteria to be allowed into the country, but they arrive through different means.

Border officials are also creating an online appointment portal to help reduce wait times at U.S. ports of entry for those coming legally. It will allow people to set up an appointment

to come and ask to be allowed into the country.

At the U.S.-Mexico border, migrants have been denied a chance to seek asylum 2.5 million times since March 2020 under the Title 42 restrictions, introduced as an emergency health measure by Trump to prevent the spread of COVID-19. But there always has been criticism that the restrictions were used as a pretext by the Republican to seal off the border.

Biden moved to end the Title 42 restrictions, and Republicans sued to keep them. The U.S. Supreme Court has kept the rules in place for now. White House officials say they still believe the restrictions should end, but they maintain they can continue to turn away migrants under immigration law.

The four nationalities that Biden addressed on Thursday now make up the majority of those crossing the border illegally. Cubans, who are leaving the island nation in their largest numbers in six decades, were stopped 34,675 times at the U.S. border with Mexico in November, up 21% from October. Nicaraguans, a large reason why El Paso has become the busiest corridor for illegal crossings, were stopped 34,209 times in November, up 65% from October.

But Venezuelans were seen far less at the border after Mexico agreed on Oct. 12 to begin accepting those expelled from the United States. They were stopped 7,931 times, down 64% from October.

Venezuelans have said the changes have been difficult, particularly with finding a sponsor who has the financial resources to demonstrate the ability to support them.

And even if they find a sponsor, sometimes they delay their arrival because they don't have the economic resources to pay for the flight to the U.S. For some, the Venezuelan passport that they need to come has expired, and they cannot afford to pay for the renewal. □

U.S. House has no members, no rules as speaker race drags on

By MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Republicans continue to squabble over who will be the next speaker, there are essentially no members in the U.S. House of Representatives only members-elect. Without a speaker, none of the them can be sworn in, and the 118th Congress can't convene or vote on any rules. Parliamentary procedure has been jettisoned in favor of controlled chaos. Members of both parties are unsure whether they can call votes or make motions on the floor because there is no speaker to rule on their requests. Committees can't be formed and legislation can't be passed.

"I don't know what my status is," said Democrat Ted Lieu of California. "I don't know if I have health care, I don't know if my staff get paid. We're looking at all of that now because this hasn't happened for 100 years."

Former Rep. Billy Long of Missouri, who just retired, has been tweeting about what he calls "Bizarroland." At one point he openly wondered in his Twitter bio whether he was still a congressman (he isn't). The rule-less, member-less House may only be a blip



House staff consult books in the House chamber as the House meets for a second day to elect a speaker and convene the 118th Congress in Washington, Wednesday, Jan. 4, 2023.

Associated Press

in history if Republicans are able to find a way forward this week and elect a new speaker. While that remains a strong possibility, a resolution to the stand-off seemed distant on Wednesday, as Republican Kevin McCarthy of California lost a second day of roll call votes on the floor. Supporters and opponents all appeared dug in. The uncertainty added to the surreal, looser-than-usual atmosphere on the House floor Wednesday as members sat in their seats for

vote after vote, hour after hour, negotiating, gossiping and wondering what comes next. Some relaxed with books or newspapers, or scrolled their phones. Some took photos and selfies, a practice that is usually forbidden by the rules. Others still had children with them in the chamber, a holdover from Tuesday's proceedings when family often accompany members to watch them be sworn in. Only they weren't sworn in on the first day of the new Congress -- the first

time that had happened in a century. In 1923, the process of selecting a speaker lasted for three days. In 1855, it dragged on for two months, with 133 ballots. "It's a very strange limbo," said Democrat Madeleine Dean of Pennsylvania, who had hoped her visiting grandchildren would get to see her sworn in on Tuesday. "We are operating by precedent." On the House floor, clerk Cheryl Johnson is holding the gavel, not the Republican majority.

"Madam speaker," Republican Chip Roy of Texas said at one point, addressing the rostrum as members usually do, before correcting himself. "Madam clerk," he amended. Off the floor, members are operating under the rules for the last Congress they think. No one really seems to know, and there are concerns about what would happen if the stalemate were to last until mid-January, when paychecks are expected. Some staff are in limbo only provisionally employed if they are new hires or switching jobs. Republican Tom Cole of Oklahoma, the incoming chairman of the House Rules Committee, said that members-elect were operating under the rules of the previous Congress, when Democrats were in control. But he added: "I don't know if that's written down." Without a speaker, "there's a lot we can't do," Cole said. Staff and members will be paid, he said, "but at some point it shuts off." As the hours ticked by, members started to ponder what-if scenarios. Lieu said he worried that lawmakers aren't able to look at classified documents important to national security, and wouldn't be able to respond to a world crisis. □

Survey: 3.3 million U.S. adults displaced by natural disasters

By MIKE SCHNEIDER
Associated Press

More than 1.3% of the adult population in the U.S. was displaced by natural disasters in the past year, with hurricanes responsible for more than half of the forced relocations, according to first-of-its-kind survey results from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The Household Pulse Survey results said that 3.3 million U.S. adults were displaced by either hurricanes, floods, fires, tornados or other disasters. The two-year-old online survey asked for the first time about displacement from natural disasters in results released Thursday.

Some states were impacted more than others. In Florida, nearly 1 million people,

or about 1 in 17 adult residents, were displaced in a state that was ravaged

by Hurricanes Ian and Nicole in the fall. More than 409,000 people or almost 1 in 8 residents were displaced in Louisiana, which had a comparatively calm hurricane season in 2022 even though residents still were dealing with the devastating impacts from Hurricane Ida the previous year. Among the states with lowest rates of the adult population being displaced by disasters were Indiana, Maine, North Dakota, Ohio and Oklahoma. Of the 3.3 million displaced adults, more than a third were out of their homes for less than a week. About 1 in 6 residents never returned

to their homes, according to the survey. The demographic makeup of the displaced didn't deviate much from the overall race and ethnic background of the U.S. population, but they tended to be poorer. About 22% of the displaced adults reported having a household income of less than \$25,000 a year, compared to 17.4% for the overall U.S. population. The Census Bureau sent invitations to more than 1 million households to participate in the experimental survey and collected a total of 70,685 responses in mid-December. □



People walk by debris that overflowed from San Lorenzo River in Santa Cruz, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 5, 2023.

Associated Press

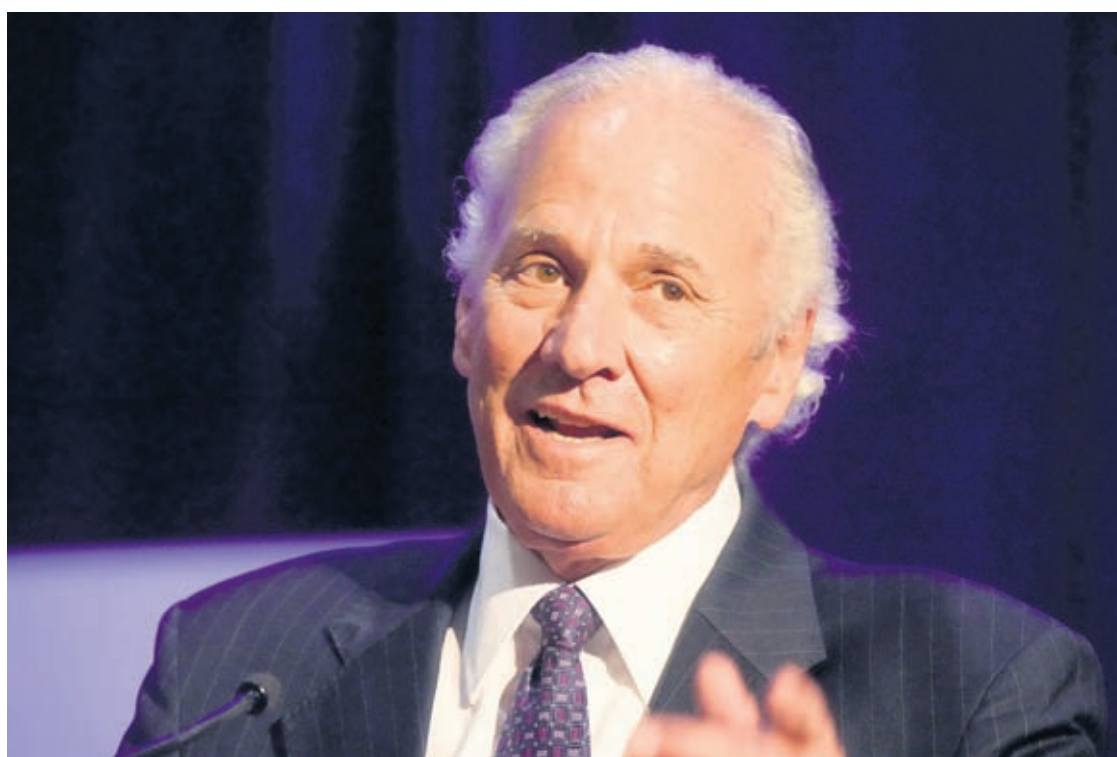
South Carolina Supreme Court strikes down state abortion ban

By **JAMES POLLARD**
Associated Press/Report for America

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The South Carolina Supreme Court struck down Thursday a ban on abortion after cardiac activity is detected typically around six weeks ruling the restriction violates the state constitution's right to privacy.

The decision comes nearly two years after Republican Gov. Henry McMaster signed the measure into law. The ban, which included exceptions for pregnancies caused by rape or incest or pregnancies that endangered the patient's life, drew lawsuits almost immediately. Since then, legal challenges have made their way through both state and federal courts.

"The State unquestionably has the authority to limit the right of privacy that protects women from state interference with her decision, but any such limitation must be reasonable and it must be meaningful in that the time frames imposed must afford a woman sufficient time to determine she is pregnant and to take reasonable steps to terminate that pregnancy. Six weeks is, quite simply, not a reasonable period of time for these two things to occur, and therefore the Act violates our state Constitution's prohibition against



Republican South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster addresses business leaders on Aug. 18, 2022, in Columbia, S.C.

unreasonable invasions of privacy," Justice Kaye Hearn wrote in the majority opinion. Currently, South Carolina bars most abortions at 20 weeks.

Varying orders have given the law's supporters and opponents both cause for celebration and dismay. Those seeking abortions in the state have seen the legal window expand to the previous limit of 20 weeks before returning to latest restrictions and back again. Federal courts had previously suspended the law. But the U.S. Supreme Court's overturning of Roe

v. Wade allowed the restrictions to take place for just a brief period. The state Supreme Court temporarily blocked it this past August as the justices considered a new challenge.

The high court's momentous decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* set off a flurry of activity at the state level. Republican-dominated states moved forward with new restrictions while abortion rights' advocates sought additional safeguards. With federal abortion protections gone, Planned Parenthood South

Atlantic sued in July under the South Carolina constitution's right to privacy. Meanwhile, other states have seen challenges to restrictions as a matter of religious freedom.

In South Carolina, lawyers representing the state Legislature have argued that the right to privacy should be interpreted narrowly. During oral arguments this past October, they argued historical context suggests lawmakers intended to protect against searches and seizures when they ratified the right in 1971. Planned Parenthood attorneys rep-

resenting the challengers have said the right to privacy encompasses abortion. They argued previous state Supreme Court decisions already extended the right to bodily autonomy.

The justices' limited ruling left the door open for future changes. The state House and Senate failed to agree on additional restrictions during this past summer's special session on abortion. Still, a small but growing group of conservative lawmakers have vowed to push that envelope once more this legislative session despite some Republican leaders' insistence no agreement is possible.

In a statement to The Associated Press, South Carolina Democratic Party Chairman Trav Robertson applauded the ruling Thursday, which he said amounted to "a voice of reason and sanity to temper the Republicans' legislative actions to strip rights away from women and doctors."

Republican South Carolina House Speaker G. Murrell Smith, Jr., wrote in a series of tweets that the state justices "followed the path of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* by creating a constitutional right to an abortion where none exists." Smith added the decision failed to respect the separation of powers. □

Associated Press

Report: Lawsuit settled in Maryland newsroom shooting

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — The families of victims in the Capital Gazette shooting and some newspaper employees who survived the deadly 2018 attack dismissed civil charges against The Baltimore Sun and Tribune Publishing this week after settling the case, the newspaper said.

Gerald Fischman, Rob Hiasen, John McNamara, Rebecca Smith and Wendi Winters died in the June 28, 2018, attack.

The Capital Gazette re-

ported on Wednesday that the plaintiffs filed a joint notice in court with The Sun and Tribune, to dismiss the claims in Anne Arundel Circuit Court against the news organization and its parent company on Tuesday afternoon. The negligence lawsuit, filed in 2021 shortly after the gunman, Jarrod Ramos, was found criminally responsible for the shooting, stated that the attack in Annapolis was "a preventable tragedy."

The lawsuit said if the de-

fendants had "taken reasonable steps to protect The Capital and its employees," the gunman "would have been detected and stopped prior to entering The Capital's newsroom, and he may never have attempted the assault at all." The lawsuit was consolidated with a similar claim in early 2022. After Tuesday's filing, any dispute between the plaintiffs and the newspaper and its parent company is settled, Steven Silverman, an attorney for



Photos of five employees of the Capital Gazette newspaper adorn candles during a vigil, June 29, 2018, across the street from where they were slain in the newsroom in Annapolis, Md.

Associated Press

the families of Smith and Fischman said Wednesday. Everything else regarding

the settlement, including the terms, are confidential, he said. □

Putin orders 36-hour holiday weekend cease-fire in Ukraine

By **ANDREW MELDRUM**
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday ordered his armed forces to observe a unilateral 36-hour cease-fire in Ukraine this weekend for the Orthodox Christmas holiday, the first such sweeping truce move in the nearly 11-month-old war.

Putin did not appear to make his cease-fire order conditional on a Ukrainian agreement to follow suit, and it wasn't clear whether hostilities would actually halt on the 1,100-kilometer (684-mile) front line or elsewhere. Ukrainian officials have previously dismissed Russian peace moves as playing for time to regroup their forces and prepare for additional attacks.

At various points during the war that started on Feb. 24, Russian authorities have ordered limited and local truces to allow evacuations of civilians or other humanitarian purposes. Thursday's order was the first time Putin has directed his troops to observe a cease-fire throughout Ukraine.

"Based on the fact that a large number of citizens professing Orthodoxy live in the combat areas, we call on the Ukrainian side to declare a cease-fire and give them the opportunity to attend services on Christmas Eve, as well as on the Day of the Nativity of Christ," according to Putin's order, addressed to Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and published on the Kremlin's website.

While not necessarily the final official word back from Kyiv, Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak tweeted that Russian forces "must leave the occupied territories only then will it have a 'temporary truce.' Keep hypocrisy to yourself." U.S. President Joe Biden declined to comment directly but said at the White House on Thursday it was "interesting" that Putin was ready to bomb hospitals, nurseries and churches on Christmas and New Year's. "I think



Local citizens walk near a Christmas tree decorated for Orthodox Christmas and the New Year festivities in Mariupol, in Russian-controlled Donetsk region, eastern Ukraine, Thursday, Jan. 5, 2023.

he's trying to find some oxygen," he said.

Putin acted at the suggestion of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, who proposed a truce from noon Friday through midnight Saturday Moscow time (0900 GMT Friday to 2100 GMT Saturday; 4 a.m. EST Friday to 3 p.m. EST Saturday). The Orthodox Church, which uses the ancient Julian calendar, celebrates Christmas on Jan. 7 later than the Gregorian calendar although some Christians in Ukraine also mark the holiday on that date. Podolyak had earlier dismissed Kirill's call as "a cynical trap and an element of propaganda." President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had proposed a Russian troop withdrawal earlier, before Dec. 25, but Russia rejected it.

Kirill has previously justified the war as part of Russia's "metaphysical struggle" to prevent a liberal ideological encroachment from the West.

Independent political analyst Tatyana Stanovaya said Putin's cease-fire order is intended to make him look reasonable and interested in peace.

The move "fits well into Putin's logic, in which Russia is acting on the right side of

history and fighting for justice," she said.

"We must not forget that in this war, Putin feels like a 'good guy,' doing good not only for himself and the 'brotherly nations,' but also for the world he's freeing from the 'hegemony' of the United States," Stanovaya, founder of the independent R.Politik think tank, wrote on Telegram.

She also linked Putin's move to Ukrainian forces' recent strike on Makiivka that killed at least 89 Russian servicemen. "He really doesn't want to get something like that for Christmas," the analyst said.

On the rainy streets of Kyiv, some questioned the Russians' sincerity in discussing a truce. "Shall we believe Russians?" wondered Svitlana Zhereva after Kirill's proposal. "On the one hand they have given their blessing to the war and to kill, and on the other hand they want to present themselves as saints who are against blood-spilling. But they should be judged by their actions."

Putin issued the truce order after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged him in a phone call Thursday to implement a "unilateral cease-fire," according to the Turkish president's

office. The Kremlin said the Russian president "reaffirmed Russia's openness to a serious dialogue" with Ukrainian authorities.

Erdogan also told Zelenskyy later by phone that Turkey was ready to mediate a "lasting peace." Erdogan has made such offers frequently, helped broker a deal allowing Ukraine to export millions of tons of grain, and has facilitated a Ukrainian-Russian prisoner swap. Russia's professed readiness for peace talks came with the usual preconditions: that "Kyiv authorities fulfill the well known and repeatedly stated demands and recognize new territorial realities," the Kremlin said, referring to Moscow's insistence that Ukraine recognize Crimea as part of Russia and acknowledge other illegal territorial gains. Previous attempts at peace talks have failed over Russia's territorial demands, because Ukraine insists that Russia withdraw from occupied areas.

Elsewhere, the head of NATO detected no change in Moscow's stance on Ukraine, insisting that the Kremlin "wants a Europe where they can control a neighboring country."

"We have no indications that President Putin has

changed his plans, his goals for Ukraine," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in Oslo, Norway. Individual NATO countries are stepping up their military support of Ukraine with increasingly advanced weapons.

In the latest pledge, the French Defense Ministry said it plans talks soon with its Ukrainian counterpart on delivering armored combat vehicles. France's presidency says it would be the first time this type of Western-made wheeled tank destroyer would be sent to Ukraine's military.

In the United States, Biden said Bradley Fighting Vehicles, a medium armored combat vehicle that can serve as a troop carrier, could be sent to Ukraine.

While more weapons arrive, the battlefield situation appears to have settled into a stalemate, increasingly a war of attrition. As winter sets in, troop and equipment mobility is more limited. In the latest fighting, Kyrlo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the Ukrainian presidential office, said Thursday at least five civilians were killed and eight wounded across the country by Russian shelling in the previous 24 hours.

An intense battle has left 60% of the eastern city of Bakhmut in ruins, Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said Thursday. Ukrainian defenders appear to be holding the Russians back. Taking the city in the Donbas region, an expansive industrial area bordering Russia, would not only give Putin a major battlefield gain after months of setbacks, but would rupture Ukraine's supply lines and open the way for Moscow's forces to press on toward key Ukrainian strongholds in Donetsk. In what appeared to be a move to entice more men to join the fight, the first convicts recruited for battle by the Wagner Group, a Russian private military contractor, received a promised government pardon after serving six months on the front line. □

Violence paralyzes Mexican stronghold of Sinaloa drug cartel

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Organized crime paralyzed the western Mexico city of Culiacan, a stronghold of the Sinaloa drug cartel, as alleged cartel members carjacked residents and set vehicles ablaze on Thursday in apparent response to the arrest of a cartel leader. Local and state authorities warned everyone to stay inside and said their federal counterparts would announce the results of the pre-dawn military operation.

Such outbursts of violence often come in response to arrests of important cartel figures as their allies attempt to create chaos.

Drug trafficking, along with immigration, is expected to be a top talking point as U.S. President Joe Biden travels to Mexico on Monday and Tuesday to meet with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Sinaloa state security chief Cristóbal Castañeda warned citizens via Twitter,



This Oct. 17, 2019 frame grab from video provided by the Mexican government shows Ovidio Guzman Lopez at the moment of his detention, in Culiacan, Mexico.

Associated Press

adding that the state was responding and would inform when they could.

The city of Culiacan posted on social media "Don't leave home! The safety of Culiacan's citizens is the most important." It said

work was suspended for all municipal employees. State education authorities announced that all administrative and teacher activities were also suspended Thursday in Culiacan.

During his morning press

conference, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador confirmed there was an ongoing operation in Culiacan, but they would share information on it later.

The operation comes just days before López Obrador

will host U.S. President Joe Biden for bilateral talks followed by a North American Leaders' Summit with Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Culiacan has seen such displays before. One of the most notorious occurred in October 2019, when federal security forces cornered Ovidio Guzmán, one of the sons of Sinaloa cartel leader Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán. When gunmen began shooting up the city with high-powered weapons, the government retreated and let the younger Guzmán escape. López Obrador said at the time he had made the decision to avoid the loss of life.

The 2019 debacle was a black eye for López Obrador's administration in the realm of security and raised even more questions about Mexico's commitment to battling the country's powerful drug cartels.

López Obrador entered office highly critical of the toll of his predecessors' drug war. □

Afghan Taliban kill 8 in raids of IS hideouts in Afghanistan

By **RAHIM FAIEZ**

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Afghanistan's ruling Taliban killed eight Islamic State militants and arrested nine others in a series of raids targeting key figures in a spate of attacks in Kabul, a senior Taliban government spokesman said Thursday. Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Taliban government, said the raids in the capital city and western Nimroz province on Wednesday targeted IS militants who organized recent attacks on Kabul's Longan Hotel, Pakistan's embassy and the military airport.

Eight IS fighters, including foreign nationals, were killed and seven others arrested in Kabul, while a separate operation in western Nimroz province resulted in two more IS arrests, Mujahid

said. "These members had a main role in the attack on the Chinese hotel and paved the way for foreign IS members to come to Afghanistan," Mujahid said in a tweet.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a deadly bombing near a checkpoint at the Af-

ghan capital's military airport Sunday. IS said that attack was carried out by the same militant who took part in the Longan Hotel assault in mid-December.

The regional affiliate of the Islamic State group — known as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province and a key rival of the Taliban —

has increased its attacks in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Targets have included Taliban patrols and members of Afghanistan's Shiite minority. IS published a photo of the attacker, identifying him as Abdul Jabbar, saying he withdrew safely from the attack on the hotel after he ran out of ammunition. It added he detonated his explosives-laden vest targeting the soldiers gathered at the checkpoint.

Mujahid said light weapons, hand grenades, mines, vests and explosives were confiscated by the Taliban's security forces during the raids on an IS hideout in the Shahdai Salehin neighborhood. Local residents reported sounds of several explosions and an hourslong gun battle.

Mohammad Hakim Pinda, a local resident, told

the Associated Press that a house that was raided had been occupied by a family that moved recently to the area. He said two women and two children were rescued from the house.

Badrudin, another resident from the same neighborhood, said Taliban security forces surrounded the area and asked people to stay inside their homes before they launched the operation.

"I wanted to come out of house, but Taliban asked me to stay inside, then (the) attack started and last(ed) about two hours," said Badrudin, who like many Afghans uses only one name. The Taliban swept across the country in August 2021, seizing power as U.S. and NATO forces were in the last weeks of their final withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years of war. □



Taliban fighters check an Islamic State group house that was destroyed in the ongoing conflict between the two in Kabul, Afghanistan, Thursday, Jan. 5, 2023.

Aruba welcomed more than 610,000 cruise passengers in 2022

ORANJESTAD – It's no secret that 2022 was a very good year for Aruba's tourism. It was a year that began a bit slow due to Covid, but as soon as the government announced their Exit Strategy, which turned out to be a hit, everything started improving.

According to the ministry of tourism, in 2022 Aruba surpassed all projections for the recovery of the tourism industry. Cruise tourism is not an exception, as this

sector also surpassed projections made for last year, and by the end of 2022, Aruba had received a total of 610.474 cruise tourists! This was a recovery of 73.4 percent compared to the last pre-Covid year, 2019. This is a great recovery after two years of pandemic.

In 2022, Aruba received different calls for the first time from Mega Cruise Ships. This became possible after a big investment which was made for a dredge

machine in our port in order to receive the cruise ships. These mega cruise ships arrive in our island with more than five thousand tourists on board, and bring a lot of economic activity for our island. There were some days in which four cruise ships docked in our port and more than ten thousand people visited Oranjestad.

Minister of Tourism, Mr. Dangui Oduber said in a press release that 2023 will be



an even better year for the tourism industry in Aruba. For cruise tourism, it is ex-

pected that Aruba will welcome about 810,000 tourists in 2023. □

Minister of Tourism received promotional T-shirt for "I am Tourism" campaign



ORANJESTAD – To mark the next chapter in the awareness campaign "Ami Ta Turismo" – which means "I am Tourism" in Papiamentu – Mrs. Tisa LaSorte, president and CEO of Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association (AHATA) presented minister of Tourism and Public Health, Mr. Dangui Oduber with a promotional T-shirt with the logo of the campaign.

During the meeting, they spoke about the challenges in Aruba's tourism, including the lack of knowledge in the community regarding the variety of attractive career options which are possible in the sector. According to the minister, "AHATA's initiative "Ami Ta Turismo" is necessary to continue motivating, inspiring and bringing awareness to our community regarding

the opportunities that tourism offers for our people."

The second series of "Ami Ta Turismo" is launching today on AHATA's social platforms. Different ambassadors will be introduced each day, who will proudly speak of their work in tourism with the goal of illustrating the passion of different dedicated people in the industry. During this time, AHATA will distribute a limited amount of promotional T-shirts to different employees in the tourism sector.

To meet each ambassador and their job in tourism, follow AHATA's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/arubahotelandtourismassociation> □

Partnership between the government and private sector necessary to revitalize city center

ORANJESTAD – For a while, members of Aruba's Parliament, citizens, businessmen and different unions have expressed concern regarding the state of our city center. They accentuate on the responsibility of the government of Aruba to bring life back to the center of Oranjestad, a challenge that current minister of Economic Affairs, Mr. Geoffrey Wever inherited and assumed with both hands.

After much planning, last month minister Wever presented the first phase of the Revitalization of Oranjestad: enhancement of the area of Wilhelminastraat, which will begin this month.

He said also that together with the private sector, in the following months they will announce some projects, for apartments, student residences and to move government departments to the city center. All of this could not be achieved without close cooperation between the private sector, financial institutions and the government.

Company for the execution of Phase One announced After a process of public tender carried out by the Department of Public Works (DOW), a company was chosen to execute the infrastructure work regard-

ing the first phase of the revitalization of Oranjestad: Arubaanse Wegenbouw Mij N.V. This company presented the best offer based on the requisites presented by DOW.

Discussions on the work with the company will begin this month to determine the starting date for construction. The duration of construction will be about 50 days. The first phase of enhancement for the area will be specifically the road of Columbusstraat, with its parking area, the crossing on Ooststraat and Wilhelminastraat and the road of Wilhelminastraat partially. Areas for pedestrians will be



expanded, with more illumination, more plants and the area will have space to be used as terraces and public seating.

According to a press release, there is close communication and cooperation with all stakeholders to make sure that this project goes according to schedule and to create the least possible nuisance for those who use this area during the execution of the first phase of this project. Quality control and the complete process will be in the hands of DOW with support

of the ministry of Economic Affairs, Communication and Sustainability, which is in charge of the revitalization of Oranjestad.

With this first phase, Wever wants to motivate and send a concrete signal to the private sector that the government of Aruba is committed to the revitalization of our city center. "Our special attention for this area will not only benefit the area, but it is also a way to create more economic activity and investment for our country", Wever said. □

The Ostrich Farm

Matividiri – One of the most entertaining vacation activities is a visit to the Ostrich Farm, a popular stopover on most island jeep tours.

Locals and visitors enjoy the guided ostrich tour at the farm and features a well-stocked locally crafted and produced Art Boutique. The highlight of the visit is always the fun interaction with the resident ostriches and emus, including a trip to the incubators and the bird kindergarten, housing baby ostriches, baby emus, chicken and ducks, and even a land turtle!

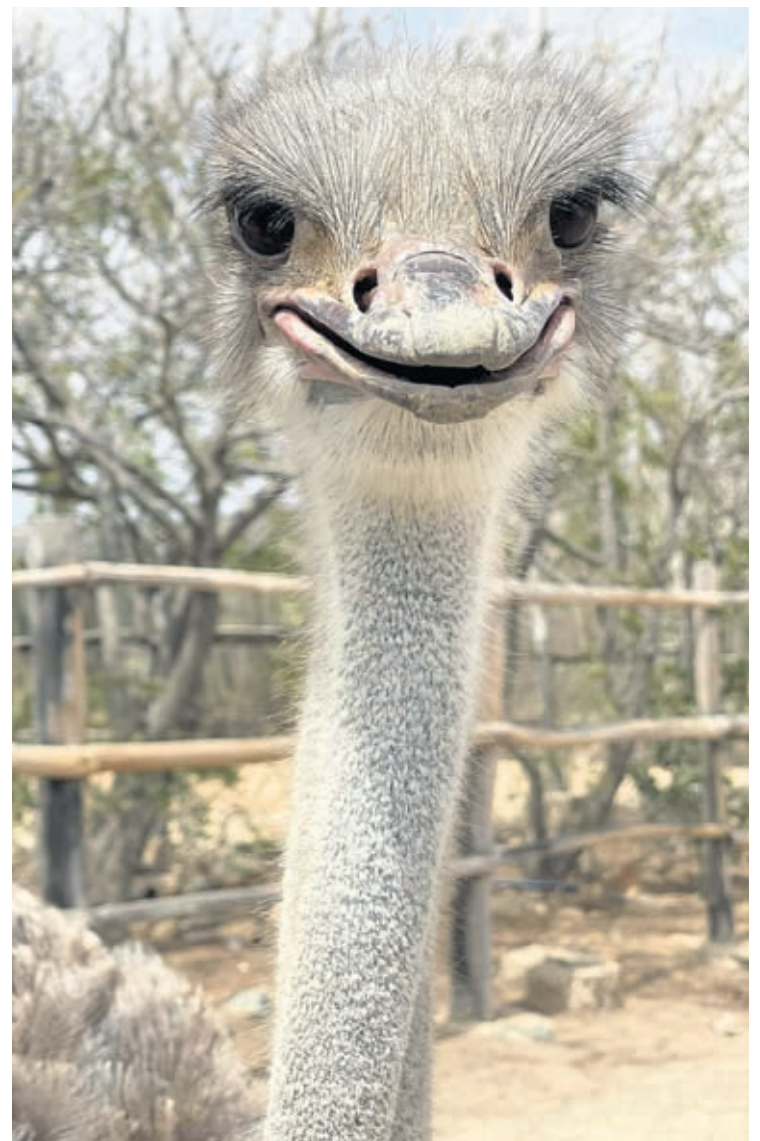
It was a National Geographic moment when on cue Mr. Ostrich flapped his wings excitedly and poked around the ground with his bill, triggering Mrs. Os-



trich who ran around in circles, flapped her wings and also poked around, before collapsing on the ground in a heap of feathers, allowing him to mount her, shaking, winding and spiraling his head in all direction!


Mr. Ostrich concluded his unexpected performance with a loud honking, his eyes rolling, then got up in a huff to nonchalantly strut away, leaving his wife and the scrutiny of our cameras.

It was a surprise reality TV moment, and not usually included in the regular program. Feeding the Ostriches is however always on the program, and they are eternally hungry, and fun! Tours are available daily every half hour from 10- 3pm. No reservations needed for small groups. □




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Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from Karen and Donald Feldman from Lynnfield, Massachusetts.

They wrote to us a lovely message saying; "Aruba to me means happiness and our family cannot think of a better place to celebrate happy occasions. This January we are celebrating 2 milestone birthdays... Tenley turns 13 and becomes a teenager and Donny turns 80(like Dick Clark, the oldest living teenager.) We love celebrating in Aruba on Eagle Beach."

We thank you very much for sharing the meaning of Aruba to you with us and our readers!☐



For today we received a lovely message from Janet Godfrey and her family from Latham, NY.

They wrote to us a lovely message saying; "Family Christmas. We all love Aruba."

Thank you for sharing your lovely message and family with us and our readers!



For today we received a lovely message from Joseph Pitti and Liz Cavallario from Upstate NY.

They wrote to us a lovely message saying; "Aruba to me is ... heaven on earth, We come to Aruba for the friendliest, happiest people and the perfect weather. We stay at CPVR while on the island and live in upstate NY."

Thank you for sharing the meaning of Aruba to you with us and our readers!

Another Treasure of Aruba's Beaches: Sea Glass!



NOORD - It is hard to imagine this happening today, but years ago people dumped all kinds of refuse straight into the ocean, including old cars, and their household garbage, which of course included lots of glass. Over the next 30 years the pounding waves cleaned the beach, by breaking down everything but glass and pottery. The pounding waves washed the trash up and down, back and forth. Tons of polished, broken glass pieces were created by the pounding surf. These smoothed, colored glass particles then settled along the sea shore in millions, and that is why you can find these beautiful and colorful pieces on the north shore beaches of Aruba.

Especially on the strip on white sand between the famous Natural Bridge" and the huge red anchor close to "Grapefield" beach you will be able to find your own

pieces of sea glass. The sea glass that was created is the product of a very long and interesting process. It can take anywhere from 10 to 30 years to make sea glass. The name for any piece of glass that finds its way to the ocean and tumbles around in the water long enough is "Sea glass.

The colorful pieces of glass are being used for decoration, handcrafts and jewelry!

Once glass makes its way into the ocean, the glass is broken up into shards and is tumbled around in the water, where sand and other rocks act like sandpaper to smooth out its rough edges. Sometimes as the sea glass is passed through fire, it becomes fire glass, the rarest of sea glass with certain inclusions, just like precious gems.

For years, the water beat against the different kinds of trash being dumped.



Glass, household appliances and even motor parts were discarded on the beach. The waves and weather conditions wore down the overwhelming amount of garbage in the water, creating millions of beautiful smooth rocks.

It's hard to believe the short-sighted mistakes we were making that could have potentially ruined these beautiful beaches. But thanks to natural processes, the ocean transformed the trash into the sea glass. Each colored gem on the beach has its own story.

in awe of the power of nature, rent a car or jeep and go explore our deserted beaches on the north side of the island. Make it a fun family day! Even if we didn't mean to pollute the Beaches how we did, it is inspiring to see just how the earth can correct our mistakes.



The ruby red glass stones are typically from old car tail-lights.

Funny, how trash can change into treasures!

Then, the sapphire rocks are the remnants of broken apothecary bottles. The most common and the easiest to find are the brown (Amstel & Polar beer), green (Heineken & Balashi beer) and clear glass which are the soft much loved "soft drink" bottles.

Everybody knows that you are not allowed to take local shells home, but the people working at the airport have no problem you taking sea glass home. A few of those pieces make great souvenirs. You can place them in a wine glass or large bottle for decoration and every time you look at it a smile will light up your face thinking back of your unforgettable Aruba vacation! ☐

If you like to see the sea glass for yourself, and be

Gino Frans, of Eliezer Foundation, celebrated 26 years free from addiction

ORANJESTAD – Eliezer Foundation is focused on helping homeless addicts. Yesterday, January 5, in a press conference with various media, the founder of Eliezer Foundation, Gino Frans celebrated 26 years of sobriety. He told a bit about his story and how he came to celebrate this milestone.

"Every year on the 5th of January I celebrate the great day in which I found deliverance. God freed me from drugs, alcohol, the streets, many other things that do not please God. But today I stand firm and I can say today I mark 26 years free from drugs", Frans said.

He said that previously he would rehabilitate, fall back into addiction, rehabilitate, fall back. He emphasized that when we tried to rehabilitate with God, that was the last time. "God showed me it is possible and I want to tell everyone to try with God."

Frans said that recently he sees a lot of young kids on the streets and they don't know what they're doing. He said that they are practically using drugs to belong in a group, and they used drugs without knowing what will happen to them. "You think you are strong, but it destroys you. I was one of those who thought everything is okay,



I am strong, I am a big guy, I thought I was all that; but little by little it sank me completely until I was dragging myself on the streets", he said.

After rehabilitating and overcoming his addiction, Frans founded a foundation to dedicate to helping other addicts on the streets. He explained that helping people he also helps himself, because he sees himself in every person that he helps.

"Drugs are like cancer, the symptoms are the same. The addict begins slowly until he sinks, because you don't go up, you go down. Each person I help

I am helping myself also because it fills me with joy, because I don't want them to be on that path. My work helps them to stand firm, like I can, and if God helped me He can help others too. This is our goal," Frans pointed out.

Together with Frans was Mr. Anthony Arends, a person with whom Eliezer Foundation battled for a long time to rid him of addiction, and in the end he managed to overcome. Frans emphasized that he tells his story not to boast, but to show that the work they do bears fruits and through them – who are addicts – they can have a bigger influence on other addicts on the streets. "When you are an addict, you rehabilitate and you

are an ex-addict, you have a lot of influence on those on the streets. We need each other, and all those who studied for this – with all respect, we need them, but they also need us. We are people who were rescued from the streets," he added.

Arends said that he began walking the path of addiction with at barely 17 years old. He began with cigarettes and after that he tried stronger things, like alcohol and cocaine. "You think you can take it and leave it, but there comes a time when it dominates you. It reaches a level where you think you can handle it, but it dominates you completely, and you lose family, you lose your

job, you lose the important things in life", Arends indicated.

He explained that he tried to overcome addiction many times, and one of the important points to achieve rehabilitation, according to Arends, is to search for God. "Without God you will not achieve it, and this is 100% because I got the opportunity thanks to God."

He said that right now he also took the decision seriously and decided he had enough. "I think you get older, you see what happens on the streets, and this plays a big role," he added.

Currently Arends has been completely sober and clean for almost a year, and he thanks God for this achievement. "Thanks to God I am reaching a year and I feel sublime. I wake up in the morning with a will, a desire, a want to fight. Contrary to when I was in that world, it is completely different. You don't know the time of day, you don't know anything."

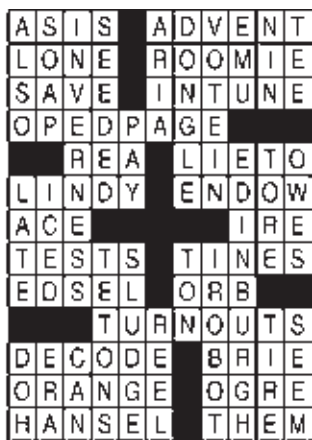
Finalizing, Arends said that he rehabilitated and is helping at the Eliezer Foundation because he wants to be an example for others. "The way Gino is an example, I want to be an example too. I want to continue helping people so that they don't go through what I went through." □



CROSSWORD

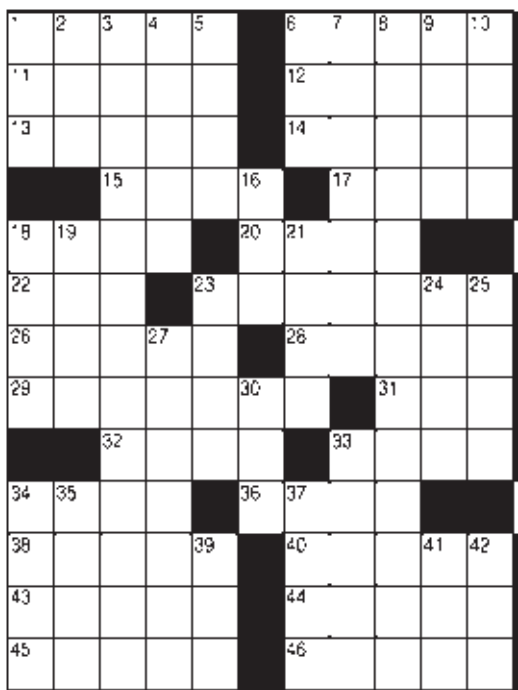
By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 43 Go
 - 1 Pluto's realm through many episodes
 - 6 Stands
 - 11 Snowy wader
 - 12 Bakery come-on
 - 13 "— the Top"
 - 14 Pull out all the stops
 - 15 Wee bites
 - 17 Brooklyn team
 - 18 Quick jab
 - 20 Sub-standard
 - 22 Mathematician Lovelace
 - 23 Books in pews
 - 26 Vodka cocktail
 - 28 Useful skill
 - 29 Treasonous fellow
 - 31 One or more
 - 32 Iditarod need
 - 33 Trojan War hero
 - 34 Bakery buy
 - 36 Pale tan
 - 38 Customary
 - 40 Skier's spot
- DOWN**
- 1 "You there!"
 - 2 Before today
 - 3 Blotto
 - 4 Spine-tingling
 - 5 Flight part
 - 6 Cloth scrap
 - 7 Some patches
 - 8 Very serious
 - 9 Give off
 - 10 Hangs low
 - 16 Bond, e.g.
 - 18 Accord
 - 19 Freshener target
 - 21 Poet Khayyám
 - 23 Table d'—
 - 24 Musical Horne
 - 25 River of 1-Across
 - 27 Odometer reading
 - 30 Praiseful poem
 - 33 Cheering loudly
 - 34 San Juan Hill setting
 - 35 Without repairs
 - 37 Staff symbol
 - 39 Headed
 - 41 Acquire
 - 42 Hosp. sections



Yesterday's answer

- 1 "You there!"
- 2 Before today
- 3 Blotto
- 4 Spine-tingling
- 5 Flight part
- 6 Cloth scrap
- 7 Some patches
- 8 Very serious
- 9 Give off
- 10 Hangs low
- 16 Bond, e.g.
- 18 Accord
- 19 Freshener target
- 21 Poet Khayyám
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- 27 Odometer reading
- 30 Praiseful poem
- 33 Cheering loudly
- 34 San Juan Hill setting
- 35 Without repairs
- 37 Staff symbol
- 39 Headed
- 41 Acquire
- 42 Hosp. sections



1-6

AXYDLBAXR
IS LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three I's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-6 **CRYPTOQUOTE**
UAVNQ K MGNII JXGNHX

NM KT UGKM KM UGX

VNQ K LKII JX FXDXDXFXV.

— VF. MXSMM

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: ASK NOT WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR COUNTRY. ASK WHAT'S FOR LUNCH. — ORSON WELLES



A row of new Ford Fusions are for sale on the lot at Butler County Ford in Butler, Pa., Nov. 19, 2015.

Associated Press

Supply chain woes caused US auto sales to fall 8% last year

By TOM KRISHER
AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Shortages of computer chips and other parts continued to hobble the U.S. auto industry last year, contributing to vehicle sales dropping 8% from 2021 to their lowest level in more than a decade.

But there's good news for consumers in the gloomy numbers: Vehicle supplies on dealer lots are growing, albeit slowly, and automakers expect at least a small easing in prices this year as inventories grow.

Automakers reported Wednesday that they sold 13.9 million cars, trucks, SUVs and vans last year as the parts shortage limited factory output amid high demand for new vehicles. It was the lowest sales number since 2011 when the economy was recovering from the Great Recession.

But sales were up slightly in the fourth quarter and inventories grew as parts supplies improved enough to increase production a little. Analysts are now expecting sales to grow by roughly 1 million to around 14.8 million this year as demand remains strong. But they'll still be far short of the normal 17 million per year before the pandemic.

With many models still in short supply, though, the average new vehicle price rose 2.5% in December to a record of just over \$46,000, according to J.D Power.

There are signs, however, that prices may be starting to ebb a little as inventories expand.

Toyota, for instance, finished the year with just under 24,000 vehicles on Toyota and Lexus brand dealer lots nationwide. That's up from about 19,000 at the end of 2021, but still far short of the 300,000 during normal years before the pandemic.

The improvement, although small, is allowing consumers to haggle a little on some slower-selling vehicles such as sedans, and even some luxury vehicles. But they're still getting top dollar for gas-electric hybrids and other more popular vehicles that are sold before they arrive on lots, said David Christ, general manager of the Toyota Division. □

Classifieds

Casa Del Mar 2BR/2B:
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Week 5/Unit 1315 (20k);
Week 8/Unit 1113 (19k);
Week 8/Unit 1409 (19k);
Week 10/Unit 1207 (17k);
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Week 14/Unit 1308 (14k); and,
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WK 7 and 14 - all views

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A grumpy Tom Hanks stars in 'A Man Called Otto'

By **JAKE COYLE**
AP Film Writer

Sentimental tales about grumpy old men and American decline have, until recently, typically been the domain of Clint Eastwood. But in "A Man Called Otto," Marc Forster's adaptation of Fredrik Backman's best-seller and a remake of the 2016 Swedish film "A Man Called Ove," it's Tom Hanks prowling the neighborhood and irritably grumbling about how things used to be. In the original, Rolf Lassgård richly inhabited the role of Ove, a curmudgeonly widower — a Forrest Grump — whose suicide attempts are foiled by needy neighbors and, ultimately, his grudging, sincere devotion to them.

Exasperation, whether directed at a crying ballplayer or a slobbering canine, has always been squarely in Hanks' wheelhouse. But despondency or even plain get-off-my-lawn orneriness are less obvious traits possessed by the actor sometimes called "America's Dad." Following Hanks' villainous turn as Col. Tom Parker in "Elvis," the 66-year-old has found in "A Man Called Otto" another role that interestingly, if not



This image released by Sony Pictures shows Tom Hanks in a scene from "A Man Called Otto." Associated Press

always entirely successfully, caters to his strengths while tweaking his familiar screen presence.

It also may rob "A Man Called Otto," which opens with Otto buying rope to hang himself with, of some of its spirit.

We know there are dark roads that Hanks just isn't going to go down, and some of the early, more caustic scenes of Forster's film strike a false note. But as "A Man Called Otto"

makes its way through Otto's life, cutting between his present-day squabbles and flashbacks of happier times with his wife, Sonya (Rachel Keller), Hanks movingly tailors the role to himself. How "A Man Called Otto" unfolds won't surprise anyone, but it does the trick for a little post-holidays heart-warming.

"A Man Called Otto" is set in the prefab row-house development Otto has long lived in, where he tirelessly

tisk-tisks any rule breakers, re-sorts misplaced recycling and berates drivers who violate the street's regulation against through traffic.

Screenwriter David Magee ("Life of Pi," "Finding Neverland") hues closely to the Swedish film as a kind of parable of community. Up and down the street are all the people the freshly retired Otto barely tolerates: friends-turned-enemies (Peter Lawson Jones, Juan-

ita Jennings), a friendly exerciser (a delightful Cameron Britton), a transgender paper deliverer and former student of Otto's wife (Mack Bayda). Most of all there is Marisol (a terrific Mariana Treviño), a pregnant mother of two has just moved in with her husband (Manuel Garcia-Rulfo). Various needs — a stray cat, a borrowed ladder, driving lessons — intrude on Otto's desires for a peaceful death and, in between aborted suicide attempts, gradually rekindle his will to live. It's sometimes too broadly drawn. Mike Birbiglia plays a predatory real estate agent from a company not-so-subtly called Dye & Merica. ("Sounds like Dying America, which it is," says Otto.) But "A Man Called Otto" is less after realism than it is a modern-day fable, with shades of Scrooge and the Grinch.

As a tale of a solitary man, Hanks has made it a poignant work of family. Rita Wilson, his wife, is a producer and is heard singing a song in the film. The younger Otto is played in flashbacks by their son, Truman Hanks. Even Chet Hanks' "White Boy Summer" blares from a car radio. □

Justice Jackson working on a memoir, titled 'Lovely One'

BY **HILLEL ITALIE**
AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson is working on a memoir. Jackson, the first Black woman appointed to the court, is calling the book "Lovely One."

"Mine has been an unlikely journey," Jackson said in a statement released Thursday by Random House.

"But the path was paved by courageous women and men in whose footsteps I placed my own, road warriors like my own parents, and also luminaries in the law, whose brilliance and fortitude lit my way. This memoir marries the public record of my life with what is less known. It will be a transparent accounting of what it takes to

rise through the ranks of the legal profession, especially as a woman of color with an unusual name and as a mother and a wife striving to reconcile the demands

of a high-profile career with the private needs of my loved ones."

No release date has been set for "Lovely One." Jackson, 52, was born Ketanji



Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, who is a U.S. Circuit Judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, poses for a portrait, Feb., 18, 2022, at the court in Washington.

Associated Press

Onyika Brown. The book's title comes from the English translation of Ketanji Onyika, the name suggested by an aunt who at the time was a Peace Corps worker in West Africa.

Jackson joined the court last year after President Joe Biden named her to succeed the retiring Stephen Breyer. She had previously been a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. "My hope is that the fullness of my journey as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, litigator, and friend will stand as a testament for young women, people of color, and dreamers everywhere," Jackson added, "especially those who nourish outsized ambitions and believe in the possibil-

ity of achieving them."

"Lovely One" is Jackson's first book, but not the first by a current member of the Supreme Court. Justices Neil Gorsuch and Sonia Sotomayor are among those who have released books in recent years. Justice Amy Coney Barrett has a deal with the Penguin Random House imprint Sentinel. Financial terms for "Lovely One" were not disclosed, although interest in her makes it likely her advance is at least comparable to the 7-figure deals negotiated in the past for memoirs by Sotomayor and Justice Clarence Thomas.

In announcing Jackson's book, Random House called it a story she tells with "refreshing honesty, lively wit, and warmth." □

Back to work not business as usual for Damar Hamlin's peers

By **ROB MAADDI**
AP Pro Football Writer

For Damar Hamlin's teammates, peers and everyone in the NFL community, going back to work is not business as usual.

Players returned to practice with heavy hearts on Wednesday, two days after Hamlin went into cardiac arrest and needed to be resuscitated on the field during Buffalo's game at Cincinnati.

Hamlin, the 24-year-old Bills safety, remains hospitalized in critical condition, but his teammates are set to play the Patriots on Sunday, and all games for Week 18 remain on schedule.

Some players across the league have expressed concern about playing this weekend because they're still processing what happened to Hamlin. Many were in tears watching him receive medical attention on the field. They're praying for his recovery and are dealing with emotions they've never experienced playing a sport.

"I'm sure if you polled the locker room there would be mixed votes on that," Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow said about playing against the Baltimore Ravens on Sunday.

"Personally, I think playing is going to be tough. But there's people that want to play, and there's people that don't. Personally, I probably want to play.



Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow speaks with the media, Wednesday, Jan. 4, 2023, in Cincinnati.

I think getting back to as normal as you can as fast as you can is how I deal with these kind of things. But like I said, everybody has a different way of dealing with it."

The league and the NFL Players Association have shared with teams, players and coaches the mental health-related resources available to them. Each team has a licensed behavioral health clinician on staff, as well as a pain management specialist.

The players' union makes a directory available to all players to help them locate a clinician near them, be it a psychiatrist, psychologist,

social worker or counselor.

"I think it is certainly key that we acknowledge how great a strain this places on everyone involved," said the NFL's chief medical officer, Dr. Allen Sills. "Certainly, the teams, the medical care providers, the staffs and this is not just for Buffalo and Cincinnati but across all our teams. ... We have resources at each of our clubs, and we've emphasized preparation in this way. Our clubs have deployed those resources with their counselors and their mental health professionals. And that support extends throughout the entire NFL family, and it will

be an ongoing need. This is something that will continue and it's something we will continue to emphasize."

The Bills held team meetings and a walkthrough practice without any media availability on Wednesday.

They are scheduled to resume practice on Thursday, with coach Sean McDermott and some players expected to speak to reporters.

Philadelphia Eagles defensive tackle Fletcher Cox said he couldn't play this weekend if Hamlin was his teammate.

"That's too hard, man,"

Cox said. "You think about this game, you think about all the guys that were right there when it happened. You always think about those guys. What's going through their mind. You know that those guys are going through it. Everybody that was right there seeing what was going on, they're going through it."

Cleveland Browns cornerback Greg Newsome II said it will be challenging to play the season finale in Pittsburgh. Hamlin grew up in the area given the extraordinary circumstances. "It's definitely going to be tough to finish out this last game and just go on the field knowing that there's somebody out there that is in a life-or-death situation," Newsome said before practice Wednesday. "It's definitely going to be very tough and hopefully that's why we got our guys around us and we can all talk through it and things like that, but it'll for sure be tough."

The New Orleans Saints had the team psychologist present when they gathered for a meeting Wednesday.

"It's OK to admit if you need a little help," coach Dennis Allen said.

Allen experienced firsthand the death of a teammate. He was a safety at Texas A&M in 1991 when kicker James Glenn died of heart failure on the field while warming up for practice. □

Associated Press

AP source: Red Sox, Devers agree to 11-year, \$331M deal

By **KYLE HIGHTOWER**
AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Rafael Devers has agreed to an 11-year contract worth \$331 million to stay with the Boston Red Sox, a person with knowledge of the agreement told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the team had not announced the deal.

Locking up Devers, a two-time All-Star third baseman, was an important move for the Red Sox and their

uneasy fans after All-Star shortstop Xander Bogaerts, slugger J.D. Martinez and pitcher Nathan Eovaldi departed in free agency.

The 26-year-old Devers reached the new deal a day after he and the team agreed to a one-year, \$17.5 million contract to avoid arbitration in his final season under club control. Devers' 11-year deal is the longest commitment this offseason by the Red Sox and Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom, supplanting the five-year, \$90 million

contract signed by Japanese star Masataka Yoshida.

Devers was the AL's starting All-Star third baseman each of the past two years. In 141 games last season, he batted .295 with 42 doubles, 27 home runs and 88 RBIs.

The Red Sox are trying to bounce back from a 2022 season in which they finished 78-84, last in the ultra-competitive AL East.

A year earlier, they won 92 games and reached the ALCS. □



Boston Red Sox's Rafael Devers watches his RBI-single against the Tampa Bay Rays during the third inning of a baseball game Monday, Sept. 5, 2022, in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Associated Press

Masters champions could be in for dinner unlike any other

By **DOUG FERGUSON**
AP Golf Writer

KAPALUA, Hawaii (AP) — This exclusive field of champions might be the most anticipated event of the year. And it's nowhere near the Pacific shores along Kapalua.

The Masters Club is the formal name of the annual dinner Tuesday night at Augusta National during the Masters in April, and the guest list is restricted to Masters champions and Chairman Fred Ridley.

Scottie Scheffler is in charge of the menu as the reigning champion, and one moment last year illustrates how this might be a dinner unlike any other.

Scheffler and his wife took a short vacation to Tennessee, walked into a restaurant and were surprised to see Bubba Watson and his wife sitting at one of the tables. Watson is a two-time Masters champion. This will be his 11th dinner.

"I told him that I was just going to have a separate table for him in the corner by himself," Scheffler said with a laugh. "Only kidding, obviously."

Even so, imagine the mood this year.

Augusta National, while not thrilled with the great di-



Scottie Scheffler plays a shot from the fringe along on the ninth hole during the Tournament of Champions pro-am golf event, Wednesday, Jan. 4, 2023, at Kapalua Plantation Course in Kapalua, Hawaii.

vide in the sport caused by the arrival of Saudi-funded LIV Golf, said it would keep its invitation criteria for the Masters.

Six former champions Watson, Phil Mickelson, Charl Schwartzel, Sergio Garcia, Patrick Reed and Dustin Johnson are now part of LIV Golf.

All of them are suspended by the PGA Tour for joining a rival league without permission.

According to court documents, Mickelson had been suspended for two months before he joined for recruiting players to LIV.

They will be in the room with Masters champions who have not looked upon kindly at the rebel league run by Greg Norman.

"They've turned their back on what has allowed them to get to this position," five-time Masters champion Tiger Woods said in July.

In an interview last June with Golf.com, 1992 Masters champion Fred Couples said of Mickelson, "I don't think I'll ever talk to him again."

Suddenly, what Scheffler decides for the menu isn't nearly as exciting as the flow of the dinner conversation.

"It's going to be really interesting, isn't it?" Jordan Spieth said. "I'm really interested in Phil, really interest-

ed to see what that's like. I don't know who he's going to talk to, what he's going to say, if he's going to go." Mickelson was not among the 31 Masters champions at the dinner last year. While he was serving a two-month PGA Tour suspension, that didn't affect his ability to the Masters. He chose not to go, just as he chose not to attend a champions dinner at the British Open at the suggestion of the R&A.

"It will be the first time we've all seen him in so long in a very interesting setting for that," Spieth said.

The seating arrangement, according to various players, is like finding a spot in a high school cafeteria. Players tend to flock to their comfort zone and sit with friends. This might be a good time to have place cards.

What Jon Rahm, whose lone major is a U.S. Open, could give to be there.

"It's probably only funny to me, but I think the Masters Champions Dinner is going to be a little tense compared to how it's been in the past," Rahm said. "So I keep thinking about it because I wish I could be there and just be able to see how things work out. □"

Associated Press

James, Durant lead early in NBA All-Star starter voting

NEW YORK (AP) — LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers and Kevin Durant

of the Brooklyn Nets might be headed toward yet another NBA All-Star Game

rematch.

James is the overall leader so far in All-Star balloting, and Durant leads all Eastern Conference players in early voting returns putting them on track to be All-Star captains for the third consecutive year.

James had 3,168,694 votes entering Thursday, topping the list of Western Conference frontcourt players. Denver's Nikola Jokic is second (2,237,768) and the Lakers' Anthony Davis is third (2,063,325).

Durant leads Eastern Conference frontcourt players with 3,118,545 votes. That's just ahead of Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo (2,998,327) and

Philadelphia's Joel Embiid (2,226,712).

Golden State's Stephen Curry leads all guards in the balloting with 2,715,520 votes. Dallas' Luka Doncic has the No. 2 spot among West guards with 2,388,502 votes.

Among East guards, Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving leads with 2,071,715 votes, and Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell is second with 1,637,374.

The top three frontcourt players and top two guards in each conference will be chosen as starters, with the leading overall vote-getters from each conference serving as captains and choosing their teams.

Fan voting counts for 50%

of the starters balloting, a media ballot counts for 25% and the ballots turned in by NBA players count for the other 25%.

James has been a captain in all five previous uses of that process, going 5-0 in All-Star Games. His team beat a Durant-picked team in 2020 and 2021, beat teams picked by Antetokounmpo in 2018 and 2019, and beat a team picked by Curry in 2017.

Voting continues through Jan. 21. The captains and the starters will be announced Jan. 26. Reserves chosen by NBA coaches will be revealed Feb. 2, and the game is Feb. 19 in Salt Lake City. □



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James peers at the American flag during the national anthem prior to the start of an NBA basketball game in Dallas, Sunday, Dec. 25, 2022.

Associated Press